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ABSTRACT

Results of a survey to determine student demand for religious studies content in introductory psychology and sociology of religion courses are discussed. The survey was administered to 382 members of the American Psychological Association and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Respondents reported that approximately one-fourth of their courses were devoted to religious topics and three-fourths of the courses were devoted to the main discipline, either psychology or sociology. Approximately one-half of the students in these courses were primarily interested in religion rather than the main discipline; thus the demand for religious content such as comparative religions or theology was moderately heavy. Although many instructors reported trying to accommodate the student demand, the consistent reply to the student responses was negative; generally, instructors do not perceive that the goals of their courses include providing religious studies content. Therefore, respondents indicated that considerable tensions existed between students and instructors because their respective course goals differed substantially. Techniques used by instructors to accomodate the student demands include concrete assignments: student religious autobiographies, participation in religious services, resource speakers, and student-initiated taped interviews. (KC)

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GENERAL RELIGIOUS STUDIES CONTENT IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

By W. Mack Goldsmith

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Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 30, 1978)

SO 011 605

Symposium: Teaching the Psychology of Values and Religion. A. Rossi, Chair.

This paper is a draft of a presentation to be given to the American Psychological Association (Div.s 2,36) on Aug. 30, 1978, in Toronto.

GENERAL RELIGIOUS STUDIES CONTENT IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

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I am a relative newcomer to teaching the psychology of religion. Although long interested and personally involved in religion, I have been trained in experimental psychology and through graduate school did not take any coursework dealing with religion except an anthropology course. There simply were no psychology of religion courses in any of the four colleges or universities I attended. In 1974 an historian at our college asked me to team-teach a course on Religious Experience. It was fun, and I decided to do more. I took a sabbatical leave to Vancouver, B.C., to spend a year learning a bit about Religious Studies and Biblical Studies to get more background. Since then I have taught the psychology of religion three times. I have struggled to identify the student constituency for this kind of course, struggled to define my own goals and biases, struggled to deliver to the students a course that would satisfy both them and me.

I teach in a state college without a religious studies program. It soon became clear that most of my students fell into one of two groups. The majority was primarily interested in religion and much less interested in psychology. A few were psychology majors with a primary commitment to psychology and a secondary interest in religion. My junior-level psychology course was designed for the minority, the psychology students. The other students were frustrated, and so was I. I recognized the legitimacy of their primary interest in religion but felt my course was not a proper

vehicle for its expression. Nevertheless, I have tried several ways to satisfy the students' needs to face religious phenomena head-on. When Al Rossi's invitation to be part of this Symposium came, I saw my chance to study the problem.

I composed a short and somewhat naive questionnaire and mailed it to some 2000 persons on the mailing lists of APA Division 36 and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Some of you, I suppose, are among my respondents. The SSSR has many more sociologists than psychologists, so I asked for information about both psychology of religion and sociology of religion courses. I got replies not only about these, but about seminary courses, religious studies courses, courses in ethics and morals, courses in the history of religions, etc. I have received back over 770 responses, almost a 40% response rate.

The questionnaire asked for the following: (1) Are you responding as a teacher, student or both? (2) If a teacher, how often have you taught the course? (3) Is the course psychology of religion, sociology of religion, both or other? (4) How strong does student demand for religious studies material (comparative religions, theology, etc.) seem? (5) What proportion of students seem to take the course because their major interest is in religion rather than in psychology or sociology? (6) How much and in what form were religious studies materials included in the course, and (7) Was the teacher of the course primarily a psychologist, a sociologist, a religion or religious studies professor, psychiatrist or other. I also asked for written comments on what approaches had been taken and how well these worked. Unfortunately, I did not ask whether the institution was a religiously-oriented or secular one, nor what other courses at the institution dealt with religion nor what size the classes were. A number of my

respondents pointed out these deficiencies and supplied the relevant information. They also supplied me with syllabi, reprints, handouts, brochures, prayers and even a book on Swedenborgian theology. Most of the replies were thorough and thoughtful. I was really touched and am grateful to so many for taking so much time and trouble for me at final exam time.

Lacking a more sophisticated theoretical structure with which to organize my data, I intend to use journalism's classics: who, what, where, and how. With these I hope to give a broad picture of how contemporary psychology and sociology of religion courses and their variants deal with the problem of religious content.

Who? The survey was mailed to 724 members of Division 36 and about 1360 subscribers to the JSSR. Some 466 simply said they had no relevant experience as a teacher or recent student. They did not further identify themselves. Of 302 who filled out the questionnaire in time for analysis, 260 (86%) responded as teachers, 22 (7%) as students and 20 (7%) as both. The median number of times instructors had taught their courses was 5 ($\overline{X}$ = 6.8) with a range of 1-40 times. Almost 40% had taught such courses ten or more times. The primary professional identities of the teachers for the courses discussed were these: 72 (24%) were psychologists, 137 (45%) were sociologists, 64 (21%) were professors of religion or religious studies, 4 (1%) were psychiatrists and 16 (5%) were "other," for example, those in philosophy, communications, etc. A few were simply identified as clergy and nine gave no identification at all. Although the question simply asked who taught the course, these percentages must be roughly the same as the proportions of the respondents, since 86% responded as teachers. The response rate from psychologists was lower than I had hoped, given that there must have been at least 800 psychologists on the combined lists.

What? Of the courses reported on, 83 (28%) were psychology of religion courses, 141 (48%) were sociology of religion, and 69 (23%) were "both or other." Most of the courses checked as "both or other" were courses in religious studies or religion departments which looked broadly at the social sciences. There were a few anthropology, philosophy, etc. courses.

Who taught what? It will surprise no one to learn that psychology of religion courses tend to be taught by psychologists, sociology courses by sociologists and religious studies courses by religious studies people. However, the association is not nearly as strong as one might suspect. Only 63% of psychology of religion courses were taught by psychologists or psychiatrists, while 90% of sociology of religion courses were taught by sociologists. Over 27% of psychology of religion courses were taught by religion professors and another 9% by those classified "other."

Basically, psychologists and sociologists stayed out of each other's fields formally, but psychologists were much more likely than sociologists to teach broadly-based, eclectic courses that defied clear description. These data are consistent with the written descriptions of the courses. It was very clear from the descriptions and syllabi that sociology of religion is a much better established teaching field than the psychology of religion, and that sociology of religion courses are much more standardized. In addition, most sociology of religion courses include a section on religious experience that may well include Freud, Jung and Maslow as well as Marx, Durkheim or Luckman. I encountered no psychology of religion courses with any significant amount of sociological material, however.

Insofar as there was a discernable trend to the content of psychology of religion courses, psychodynamic-developmental approaches seemed most common, and existential ones were next. Freud and Jung were very popular

and Fromm, Maslow and Allport were frequently mentioned. Pruyser's A Dynamic Psychology of Religion[1] (1968) seemed to be the most popular text. There seemed to be a puzzle about William James. Every one mentioned him as still dominating the field, but relatively few course descriptions or syllabi actually assigned James to be read.

Where? I did not ask respondents where they taught or studied. Responses came from all over the U.S. and Canada. Canadians, in fact, responded faster and at a higher rate than Americans. I did not try to tabulate the kinds of institutions but it was clear that a high proportion came from schools with religious affiliations, most frequently Catholic. More small schools than large ones were represented, relative to their proportions on my mailing lists. There was a substantial number of respondents from seminaries and graduate departments of religion, too, although many of these respondents pointed out that their courses were not the introductory type about which I had asked. I wish I had more systematic data on kind of institution because the nature of the school was a critical variable in determining both the extent of student demand for religious studies content in courses and the extent to which the faculty were willing to supply it. Indeed, respondents from religiously affiliated colleges often began their comments by noting that obviously their students were not like mine. I taught psychology at a church-related college for two years before I took my present job, so I knew what they meant.

How? Here is the main question: how much demand for religious studies material was felt by the respondents and how were those demands met? Strength

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1. Pruyser, P. W. A Dynamic Psychology of Religion, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1968.

of demand was measured on a simple five-point scale with "1" labelled "No Demand" and "5" labelled "heavy Demand." There were no other labels. The content for this question described "general religious studies" as including comparative religion, theology, etc. The overall mean score on this scale was 2.78, SD = 1.17, with a slight positive skew (n = 296). The demand was thus judged to be moderate, on the average, but with substantial variability. A parallel question asked for a rough estimate of the percentage of students in the course whose major reason for taking it was an interest in religion rather than an interest in psychology or sociology. The mean estimated percentage = 42%, SD = 27.2, and negligible positive skew. Although these two questions asked for somewhat different things, and thus are not precisely comparable, I put the second one in primarily to calibrate the first one with its subjective five-point scale. The distributions of responses to the two items are similar, with means slightly below the middle of the available scale. The two measures were correlated $\underline{r} = .54$, $p < .001$. In short, these two measures indicate a very substantial demand for religious studies material.

How was this demand met? Another question asked how much general religious studies material was included in the course. Possible responses were: "None," "Brief Intro or Survey," "¼ of content," "½ of content," "More than ½," and "Other." On the average, one-fourth of the content of these psychology and sociology of religion courses was devoted to religious studies material, again with substantial variability. The correlations of this measure of amount of content with the two measures of perceived demand were significant, of course, but markedly lower than the correlations between the two demand measures, $\underline{r} = .30$ and .36, respectively for amount of content with strength of demand and with percentage of students, respectively.

These correlations suggest that, although many teachers who perceive demand for religious studies content tried to accommodate it, there were also many who did not. Written comments confirm these data; in fact, some respondents tell their classes at the beginning that the course will be a straight psychology or sociology class, and that students who want to solve their own religious problems or study religious beliefs should get out of the class. For example, one respondent wrote,

> "Some students clearly have their expectations rather rudely violated, but I am strictly a sociologist and since I find sociology of religion an excellent subject matter through which to teach sociological analysis, I am as unwilling to 'make concessions' as I am to deal with general religious studies materials. On the first day of class, I describe what I believe sociology to be (a science) and suggest that while the content of the course does not directly challenge religious belief, it has a tendency to do so indirectly. If a student can't gather what's in the air from this (and some can't), so much the worse for them...I haven't really had much demand for general R. S. content since the year in which a large number of religion majors took the course."

I was interested to see if instructors differed from students both in perceived demand and in reports of how that demand was dealt with. My sample of student respondents was too small and unrepresentative to make statistically meaningful comparisons, (e.g., 65% of students reported on sociology of religion courses compared to 48% for teachers. However, the data suggest that students saw a higher level of demand and a lower level of accommodation to that demand than did teachers. For example, 41% of students reported no general religions materials in their courses, while only 14% of teachers reported "None." Although students did not differ from teachers on the two perceived demand measures, written comments suggested a problem. One student wrote:

> "Both of the courses I have taken seemed to have been

> based on the assumption that students already had a background of knowledge about religion - not that there were any prerequisites for the course. I sense that students often take these courses because of their own personal search for values and beliefs. If that's the case, they aren't finding what they expect. Religion in both these cases was treated very academically. I don't know about the level of dissatisfaction because both professors controlled their classes fairly tightly and I don't remember hearing comments one way or the other..."

Other students wrote of instructors' ill-concealed impatience to get on with the psychology or sociology on the few occasions when the students did swing the discussion to religious beliefs and values. There were only 22 persons responding as students and 20 as both student and teacher, and they are certainly not typical students, since their names appeared on the Div. 36 or JSSR mailing lists. Still, the consistent tone to the student responses was negative and suggests that most of their instructors were insensitive to their desires for more religious content. Many instructors also commented on receiving negative student feedback on this point. Here is a mild example from a teacher at a state university who begins her course by briefly surveying world religions before getting into sociological analysis:

> "This does not satisfy many students who, on evaluations at the end of the course, find the instructor 'interesting' but the course 'uninteresting.' I interpret this as meaning they would prefer the history/religious studies approach to the sociological approach."

Two instructors reported such strong student criticism, combined with dropping enrollments, that they no longer taught the course.

The kind of course and who taught it made a great deal of difference in how much demand for religious studies content was perceived and taught. Sociologists and their courses admitted the least such material and religion professors the most, by a wide margin. Psychologists included more relig-

ious content than sociologists, but the differences were not great.

There was an important difference by kind of school. In general, teachers at secular schools, especially state universities, reported a high level of student demand for religious content. Not surprisingly, students at seminaries and graduate departments of religious studies also demanded a lot. However, student demand at undergraduate colleges with strong religious affiliations was strikingly low. Teachers at these institutions often reported that their religion departments adequately met the need; indeed, some reported that students took psychology or sociology courses to get away from the religions department. Some teachers at larger universities with strong religious studies departments also reported low student demand in psychology and sociology courses.

The relative values that students put on social scientific vs. theological explanations of religious phenomena also differed according to kind of school. Students seem to favor those approaches to which they have least access. That is, at a secular campus the students want to personalize and theologize; at religiously affiliated colleges, they want to explain religion away. One psychologist at a church-related school reported that her students were entirely willing to psychologize away any religious fact and she found that she had to defend the integrity of theological categories and ideas. A priest teaching the sociology of religion at a Catholic school found his students perfectly willing to reduce other religions to mere social variables, but they refused to consider that such principles might be applied to their own faith. Some instructors, faced with this kind of student response, capitalized on it in order to keep student satisfaction higher; one instructor at a Catholic college wrote that he uses the Mormons

or Jehovah's Witnesses as examples for sociological analysis because the students are less threatened in their religious beliefs. A few contrary teachers consider it their duty to "demythologize" their students'naive faith. They also reported taking their lumps for this in student evaluations.

On one point there was universal agreement: student knowledge of religion is abysmal. Many instructors complained that students know next to nothing about their own and other Western traditions, not to mention non-Western ones. One teacher at a state university reported that "some 75% of them literally do not know ... an epistle from an apostle," and that he has to spend up to half his course on religious content before he can address problems of sociology of religion. Several teachers at religiously affiliated schools similarly complained that their students brought with them barely a Sunday school acquaintance with their own faiths, although some of those students might already have had courses in the religion department. In fact, many professors of the psychology and sociology of religion appeared to include religious content in their courses to combat this ignorance when they would not have done so to accommodate student interest.

Equally frustrating, especially to sociologists whose stock in trade is the analysis of Western institutional religion, is the swing of student interest first to Eastern religions, notably Zen, and more recently to exotic sects and cults, witchcraft and the like. Psychologists seemed better able to cope with the students' attraction to "far out" religions expressions, and some incorporate into their courses exercises in meditation, chanting and, in one case, Sufi dancing.

All is not bleak. Although tough-minded, data-based courses in both psychology and sociology reported a lot of student dissatisfaction, experi-

entially oriented courses generally seemed to go well. Although most sociologists are sticking to the hard line, psychologists and religious studies professors tend to stress experiential involvement through techniques such as having students write religious autobiographies, participation in religious services, etc. High personal involvement by students seemed to be the key to student satisfaction in most cases, and it was clear that happy students make a happy instructor. High instructor involvement pays off, too. One respondent said that "warm enthusiasm" was the one essential ingredient, and it was clear that even tough empirical courses went well with a highly competent, enthused instructor.

In general, though, most instructors reported that the more general religions material they included and the more experiential expression of religious need they allow, the better the course went. The experiential aspects of the course chiefly determine whether the course is emotionally "hot" or "cold." Courses built on the students' own religious experiences are "hot" courses. "Cold" courses try to keep an arm's length between observing religious phenomena and experiencing them. It is clear that a few teachers prefer a "hot" course and despair a lack of passionate, intense involvement of students in their own existential states. But most of my respondents despaired the opposite: the unwillingness of many students to interact with any religious ideas other than those they might personally find useful. The "hot" vs. "cold," existential vs. analytic styles raise the questions of whether these courses should be directed chiefly toward understanding of oneself or of others.

What techniques are used and what works? Here are a few gleanings: (1) existential involvement at the beginning of the course gets students

"hooked" and allows the instructor to introduce analytic and empirical materials later. One instructor "breaks the ice" on the first day of class by having students present openly their own backgrounds, religious experiences and interests. He says this increases both interest and tolerance for the views of others. (2) Anything concrete is better than anything abstract; some psychologists have their classes discuss actual case materials from their clinical experience and from this base introduce both empirical measurement principles and abstract personality theories. (3) The classics are not popular with students; i.e., Weber, Durkheim, Freud, James. Contemporary approaches are better received, provided they are not overly technical. One good source of such materials is the religion sections in TIME, NEWSWEEK, etc. Religious studies professors like to include exotic and cross-cultural materials, such as the Autobiography of Malcolm X, Black Elk Speaks, etc., but it is not clear that these succeed any better than more familiar sources. (4) Bringing outside resource people into class is a sure-fire hit. Typically, these are local representatives of various religious positions, although they may be practicing psychologists commenting on religious effects in their clients, etc. Instructors who used such resource people found that their classes benefitted most when a lot of student questions were allowed and when there was a follow-up session which analyzed the guest speaker's position for its psychological or sociological components. (5) Quite a few instructors reported using films, but there was surprisingly little comment on their popularity or effectiveness. (6) Student projects that require outside field experience work well. For student projects, I give a choice of a written book review or conducting several taped interviews with religious persons. The tapes are turned in

as the project. Only two or three of my students each year choose book reviews, and students who do interviewing projects often report them to be the highlight of the course. One instructor wrote, "I make students attend ten churches of my choice."

There have been several recent attempts to describe and compare various pedagogical models for the psychology of religion, for example, Capps[2] (1977) and Rogers[3] (1977). I spent a little time trying to imagine where most of my respondents would fit into Capps' or Rogers' models, but I did not succeed well. The subject needs a survey, as Capps notes, but most of my respondents did not sound as though they taught from any clearly articulated pedagogical plan. While a few teach ebulliently to packed houses, it was clear that many instructors are discouraged with trying to define and defend their subject matters. Many feel deeply that the social sciences have only recently been freed from philosophic and theological domination and they are loath to admit these materials no matter how much their students desire it. These questions have no easy answer, yet the whole future of the psychology and sociology of religion depend upon how graciously and creatively we can respond.

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2. Capps. D. Research models and pedagogical paridigms in psychology of religion. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious Research Association, Chicago, October, 1977.

3. Rogers, W. R. The dynamics of psychology and religion: Teaching in a dialogical field. Paper presented to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Chicago, October, 1977, and American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, December, 1977.

SURVEY OF APPROACHES TO TEACHING PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Dear Colleague:

I am to make a symposium presentation for Division 36 of the American Psychological Association at the APA's annual convention in Toronto, August 1978. The symposium's theme is "Issues in Teaching the Psychology of Values and Religion." My topic is, "General Religious Studies Content in the Psychology of Religion," and I proposed this topic because of my frustrations trying to deal with student demand for general Religious Studies content (i.e., world religions, theology, etc.) in my junior level Psychology of Religion course. The symposium is supposed to deal with the nuts and bolts of teaching psych of religion classes: I find the student expectation of general religions content to be one of my toughest "nuts."

I'd really appreciate your help!! This little questionnaire is simply to survey (1) the scope of this demand in psychology and sociology of religion classes, and (2) where the demand exists, what is done about it; i.e., is it welcomed, accommodate, or refused, and (3) in what practical ways. Secondly, while I especially want responses from the teachers of such courses, I also want to survey those who have taken psychology or sociology of religions courses in the last five years.

The courses I am interested in are first level (not advanced) psych or soc of religion classes. *Have you had relevant experience? Yes_____ No_____.* (If "No," please return form anyway, and thank you for your trouble.)

1. *I am answering as: a teacher _____ or a student _____ or both _____. (Check one.)*

   If a teacher, how many times (approx.) have you taught the course(s):_____.

   The course(s) referred to below is(are):

   Introduction to Psychology of Religion (or equivalent title): _____
   Introduction to Sociology of Religion (or equivalent title): _____
   Both or other (specify):_____

2. *In the course(s) referred to, how strong has the student demand for general Religious Studies content seemed? Content such as theology, comparative religions, etc.*

   No Demand 1 2 3 4 *Heavy Demand* 5

   If possible, estimate the proportion of students in the course(s) whose major reason for taking the course(s) is an interest in general religions rather than in psychology or sociology. (I expect the estimates to be rough, but try: _____%.

3. *How much general religious studies material is(was) included in the course(s)? Consider both class and text materials.*

   None_____ Brief Intro or Survey_____ ¼ of content_____ 1/3 of content_____ ½ of content_____
   more than ¾_____. Other (specify):_____

   Teacher of course(s) -yourself if you teach- is(was) primarily:

   Psychologist_____ Sociologist_____ Religious Studies or Religion professor_____
   Psychiatrist_____ Other (specify)_____

   If general religions materials are(were) included, indicate the form(s):

   Lectures_____ Text or outside readings_____ Student projects_____ Other (specify)_____

4. *On the other side of this sheet, please describe the approaches taken to inclusion of religious studies materials in your psychology or sociology of religion course(s). If you are a teacher, I'm mostly interested in what you actually do or have done in your own classes, but I would also like descriptions of approaches you know that others have used.*

5. *How well have these approaches worked? If you are answering as a student, how well satisfied were you and other students? If a teacher, are you satisfied? What feedback do you get from your students? What advice or cautions can you offer? Please answer on the back side.*